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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
 TAGS: PREL, OREP (ALEXANDER, BILL), CU, US
 SUBJ: CODEL ALEXANDER: VISIT TO CUBA AND SESSION WITH FIDEL CASTRO

REF: HAVANA 4511

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: CONGRESSMEN WILLIAM ALEXANDER AND MICKEY LELAND, ACCOMPANIED BY THREE STAFFERS AND AN ESCORT OFFICER, VISITED CUBA AUGUST 13-15, 1984. THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE VISIT WAS A SEVEN-HOUR SESSION WITH FIDEL CASTRO AT HIS ISLAND RETREAT. EXCEPT FOR ONE ISSUE REPORTED REFTEL, IT APPEARS THAT LENGTHY DISCUSSIONS WITH CASTRO BROKE NO NEW GROUND BUT ALLOWED CASTRO ONCE AGAIN TO STATE CUBAN POSITIONS TO OPPOSITION CONGRESSMEN FROM THE UNITED STATES. CODEL DID NOT VISIT HAVANA AND HAD ALMOST NO CONTACT WITH USINT, PROBABLY THE RESULT OF DELIBERATE CUBAN PLOY. ALTHOUGH CODEL HAD MEETINGS WITH OTHER HIGH LEVEL CUBAN OFFICIALS, USINT HAD NO TIME TO OBTAIN READOUT.
 END SUMMARY.

3. HIGHLIGHT OF CODEL VISIT TO CUBA WAS A SURPRISE TRIP BY HELICOPTER TO FIDEL CASTRO'S ISLAND HOME ON CAYO PIEDRAS FOR DINNER AUGUST 15 AND A 7-HOUR DISCUSSION WITH CASTRO. ACCORDING TO THE CONGRESSMEN, CASTRO SPOKE ENTHUSIASTICALLY ABOUT JESSE JACKSON'S VISIT TO CUBA AND INDICATED CUBA SERIOUSLY HOPES TO BE ABLE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, BUILDING UPON THE IMPETUS PROVIDED BY THE JACKSON VISIT. CASTRO SEVERAL TIMES ASSERTED THAT HE WISHED TO TAKE NO ACTION WHICH MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS AN ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE WITH THE CURRENT US ELECTION CAMPAIGN, CITING HIS CONCERN THAT THE QUESTION OF US/CUBAN RELATIONS IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT TO BE INSERTED INTO PARTISAN POLITICS. (THE CONGRESSMEN TOLD CASTRO THAT THEIR DELEGATION ORIGINALLY WAS INTENDED TO BE A BIPARTISAN ONE, BUT THAT THE REPUBLICAN DROPPED OUT BECAUSE OF THE DALLAS CONVENTION.)

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4. ACCORDING TO CONGRESSMAN ALEXANDER, CASTRO'S REMARKS TOOK THE FORM OF A LENGTHY BUT FASCINATING MONOLOGUE IN WHICH HE DISCUSSED IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM, COMMUNISM AND WESTERN DEMOCRACIES, AS WELL AS FOREIGN RELATIONS TOPICS. ALEXANDER, WHO HAD VISITED GRENADA IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE US RESCUE MISSION THERE, WAS IMPRESSED WITH HOW FIRMLY CASTRO DEFENDED THE ASSISTANCE CUBA HAD PROVIDED GRENADA AND HOW HE INSISTED THAT GRENADA NOW IS THE PRIME EXAMPLE OF US IMPERIALISM IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. ACCORDING TO ALEXANDER, ONE THEME WHICH RAN THROUGHOUT CASTRO'S COMMENTS WAS THAT LATIN AMERICANS ARE FED UP WITH WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS US ARROGANCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, PARTICULARLY WHEN DEALING WITH THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.

5. BOTH CONGRESSMEN SAID THAT CASTRO INDICATED WILLINGNESS TO REMOVE CUBAN TROOPS FROM ANGOLA BUT MADE THE USUAL REFERENCES TO THE PUBLICLY-KNOWN ANGOLAN/CUBAN STATEMENTS REGARDING CONDITIONS TO BE MET PRIOR TO ANY CUBAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL. CONGRESSMAN LELAND SAID HE WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE CUBAN POSITION, HAVING ALSO HEARD IT ON EARLIER TRIPS TO HAVANA. TIME DID NOT PERMIT THE CONGRESSMEN TO OFFER DETAILS OF CASTRO'S COMMENTS ON NICARAGUA OR CENTRAL AMERICA, EXCEPT TO SAY THAT THEY FELT THERE WAS NOTHING NEW IN HIS CRITICISM OF USG POLICIES AND ATTITUDES IN THAT REGION.

6. CONGRESSMAN ALEXANDER APPEARED ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT POSSIBLE FUTURE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE US AND CUBA IN THE FIELD OF OCEAN SCIENCE. HE SAID HE WAS SURPRISED AT THE DEPTH OF CASTRO'S KNOWLEDGE IN THIS FIELD AND HE THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE A NON-CONTROVERSIAL AREA OF LOW KEY BILATERAL COOPERATION AT SOME STAGE DURING A FUTURE US/CUBAN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS.

7. THE CODEL ON SHORT NOTICE WAS ASKED TO ARRIVE IN CUBA AT THE VARADERO BEACH RESORT AREA, SUPPOSEDLY BECAUSE MANY OF THE OFFICIALS THEY WISHED TO SEE WERE VACATIONING THERE. CODEL APPEARED NEVER TO HAVE PRECISE INFORMATION ABOUT ITS SCHEDULE, WHICH WAS CONTROLLED BY ALFREDO RAMIREZ OTERO, WHO ALSO SET UP THE JACKSON VISIT. PRIOR TO THE MEETING WITH CASTRO, THE CODEL MET WITH HAVANA MAYOR OSCAR FERNANDEZ MELL AND FOREIGN MINISTER ISIDORO MALMIERCA. VICE PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ HOSTED A LUNCHEON FOR THEM. THE CODEL ALSO MET WITH ABRAHAM MACIQUES, HEAD OF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT'S AGENCY WHICH PROVIDES SERVICES TO FOREIGN DIPLOMATS, A RATHER INCONGRUOUS APPOINTMENT WHICH WE AScribe TO THE FACT THAT HE TOO MUSHT HAVE BEEN VACATIONING NEARBY. USINT'S CONTACT WITH CODEL WAS LIMITED TO TELEPHONE CALLS UNTIL ACTING PRINCIPAL OFFICER WENT TO VARADERO FOR A 30-MINUTE MEETING JUST PRIOR TO CODEL'S DEPARTURE. TIME DID NOT PERMIT USINT TO LEARN ANYTHING ABOUT THE SUBSTANCE OF CODEL'S MEETINGS WITH OTHER CUBAN OFFICIALS.

8. ATMOSPHERICS: CODEL WAS TAKEN TO THE BAY OF PIGS AREA AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 15, BUT HAD NO TIME TO EXPLAIN TO USINT WHAT THEY DID THERE. THEY WERE PICKED UP BY LUXURIOUSLY OUTFITTED SOVIET MADE VIP HELICOPTER BEARING NUMBER 66) AT THE BAY OF PIGS LANDING STRIP AND TAKEN TO CAYO PIEDRAS AT 8:00 P.M. AUGUST 15. CASTRO GREETED THEM BY SHOWING OFF ABOUT 20 LOBSTERS HE SAID HE HAD CAUGHT WHILE SPEAR FISHING AND OFFERING THEM THEIR CHOICE OF LOBSTERS FOR DINNER. THE SESSION WITH CASTRO LASTED LATE INTO THE MORNING HOURS AND THE CODEL RETURNED TO VARADERO BY HELICOPTER ABOUT 4 A.M. AUGUST 16.

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9. COMMENT: BOTH CONGRESSMEN AND THEIR STAFFERS
EXPRESSED REGRET THAT THEY WERE UNABLE TO VISIT USING
FOR ANY SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS, BUT SAID THEIR SCHEDULE
WAS ENTIRELY IN THE HANDS OF THEIR CUBAN HOSTS. AS
HAS HAPPENED ON MANY OTHER OCCASIONS, ONCE AGAIN
CASTRO WAS ABLE TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH A CONGRESSIONAL
DELEGATION AND KEEP USING ALMOST ENTIRELY OUT OF THE
PICTURE.

TODD

END OF MESSAGE

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